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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RABAT 000172

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PBTS](#) [KPAL](#) [WI](#) [AG](#) [IR](#) [IS](#) [MO](#) [MR](#)  
SUBJECT: CHARGE'S CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER FASSI FIHRI:  
SHARM EL SHEIK, IRAN, WESTERN SAHARA AND THE HUMAN RIGHTS  
REPORT

REF: A. STATE 14575  
[1](#)B. STATE 13997  
[1](#)C. RABAT 0191  
[1](#)D. RABAT 0736  
[1](#)E. RABAT 0797

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Classified By: Classified by CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri (TFF) told Charge February 25 that he would go to the Sharm el Sheikh donor conference and looked forward to meeting the Secretary.

He believed that Mauritania should be included in what he viewed as an Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) meeting there and that the U.S. should do more to support reconciliation and new elections in Mauritania. He praised the Mitchell mission. TFF thought channeling Gaza aid through the Islamic Development Bank would not help Hamas, which Qatar was trying to assist. King Mohammed VI had sent TFF to Bahrain in a show of support; now Morocco was in a spiraling spat with Iran. Morocco was pleased with the visit of UNSYG Western Sahara Personal Envoy Ross but disappointed that it had not heard back yet from him on messages to Algerian President Bouteflika from the King. TFF welcomed the release of the Human Rights Report. Morocco did not agree with all of its contents but was committed to the ongoing dialogue with the Embassy, which had helped improve the human rights environment. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge and A/DCM called on Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi Fihri (TFF) February 25 to deliver the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and discuss both Western Sahara and Middle East developments (per demarches reftels). TFF was accompanied by the Director General responsible for Arab/Islamic Affairs, Mohammed Azeroual; Chief of Staff Nasser Bourita and Americas Director Fouad Yazorgh. Fassi Fihri opened by assuring us of continued close cooperation with the USG during Charge,s stint.

MEPP/Sharm/Mauritania  
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[1](#)3. (C) At the outset of the 75-minute meeting, TFF moved directly to discussion of the Middle East situation. He said he would attend the donor meeting in Sharm el Sheikh, then a meeting of the six ministers to discuss the Arab peace initiative, and the subsequent Arab ministerial in Cairo to prepare for the Arab League summit in Qatar. Morocco would make a modest pledge for Gaza, building on assistance already delivered, probably to help reconstruct a hospital. These were challenging times, partly due to Iranian meddling

through various puppets. In response to Charge,s transmittal of the offer from Secretary Clinton for a meeting with the four North African Foreign ministers in Sharm, TFF accepted in principle, noting that Morocco always welcomed any effort at promoting harmony in the Maghreb region. He wondered at the response of Algeria, given its refusal of a trilateral last fall. He also wondered if he might be seeing Secretary Clinton in other formats, including a follow up to Secretary Rice,s meetings with the Arab Peace initiative group of eight ministers in New York, just prior to the UNSC Gaza vote in January. He stressed that he would welcome a side meeting/pull aside.

¶4. (C) TFF also expressed concern at the exclusion of Mauritania from what could be considered a continuation of traditional USG meetings with the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) ministers. Maintaining the fragile AMU was important, he said. After Mauritania opened diplomatic relations with Israel, Qadhafi had tried to call a meeting of the four Ministers to exclude and expel Mauritania. Morocco had opposed this, and it did not happen. While Morocco believed that the putsch should not be maintained, there was a process of transition underway that required both reconciliation and an election. Morocco is a neighbor and had to deal with whoever is in control, fearing a breakdown in security. So far General Abdel Aziz has agreed to a free election, a transitional government, and committed himself not to run as head of the State Council or as a general; so he cannot use the resources of the state to support a run. Returning to the Maghreb/AMU theme he noted that the five AMU chiefs of security (intelligence) had just met ) in Nouakchott. He hoped the USG would reflect on this as a good initiative and consider playing a bridging role in Mauritania. Charge underscored that the U.S. also wants free and fair elections, but we do not believe that elections on June 6 represent a solution to Mauritania,s problems. Charge stressed that U.S. policy toward Mauritania has not otherwise changed,

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i.e., we could not accept the junta and insisted on a rapid return to full democracy.

¶5. (C) Charge also noted the importance at the Sharm meeting of staying focused on helping the Palestinian Authority (PA) as the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people and to support Abbas not Hamas. Mechanisms, including those being considered by the gulf countries that could eventually channel support through local authorities could undermine that goal and the USG believed they should be avoided. TFF said that Morocco believed it was vital to support Abbas. The GOM had held steadfast against Hamas and anything that could support it and had helped kill a Qatari proposal to channel funds to Hamas. The Islamic Development Bank, however, was not a terrorist bank. It was a standard, effective and transparent method of delivering assistance with a good track record and he did not understand why this would be a problem. TFF claimed that Algeria would put its USD 200 million donation not in the mechanism, but directly into the hands of the local administration.

¶6. (C) In response to Charge,s brief on Sen. Mitchell,s mission, TFF congratulated the President and the Secretary on their choice of Mitchell. Mitchell was well known in the region, and Morocco would do what it could to make his effort a success.

Iran/Bahrain

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¶7. (C) TFF said King Mohammed VI was troubled by Iran,s aggressive attitude toward Bahrain and its manipulation of Arab proxies. On hearing of Natiq Nuri,s reassertion of Iranian claims to Bahrain, the King immediately wrote and released a letter of support to the Bahraini monarch and sent TFF to Manama to demonstrate this in a tangible manner. The Iranians called in the Moroccan Charge in Tehran and issued a communique via IRNA criticizing the GOM. Many states, such

as Tunisia had issued statements of support for Bahrain, but no other has been so subjected to Iranian ire. In response, TFF said he had called in the Iranian Ambassador to protest the public complaint and recalled his Charge in Tehran for one week of consultations. He believed that the Iranians want to mobilize public support in Morocco for their position, but Morocco would make its own public statement. This would put Morocco in a more antagonistic position than the Bahrainis, with whom Iran was rushing to make up. (Note: The MFA issued a press release on Feb. 26 about TFF calling in the Iranian Ambassador and expressing Morocco's deep astonishment at Iran's approach and utter rejection of the territorial claim.)

#### Western Sahara

18. (C) On Western Sahara, for once not at the top of the list, TFF said that Morocco was pleased with UNSYG Personal Envoy Christopher Ross, visit and believed that Ross had sufficiently reflected on his mission and had made a good impression. Ross, concern about avoiding an unproductive fifth round was sensible and preparation was a good idea. Ross told him that the UNSYG appreciated the key role of Algeria, but he himself believed that Morocco still exaggerated it. TFF said Morocco did not want to minimize the role of the Polisario and understood that it was with it that a deal had to be struck, but ... only Algeria can convince the Polisario. The FM defended the presence in the GOM Manhasset delegation of Royal Sahrawi Council (CORCAS) head Kalihenna Ould er Rachid and noted that Sahrawi representation in the delegation was a fundamental issue for Morocco. The Polisario was not the sole legitimate representative of the Sahrawi. The key to the problem, he admitted, was confidence. The GOM welcomed Polisario participation in elections in the Sahara, preparation of cadre for future autonomy.

19. (C) TFF said Mohammed VI is now personally invested in getting a solution and underscored the risks Morocco was taking even by going down the path of autonomy. He was aware of the importance of human rights, saying Morocco was not a colonizer. The GOM was open to new approaches, a role for former Algerian FM Brahimi or for a former PM, but wondered whether even they would be able to move Algeria's military rulers. He said the King was serious about reaching out to Algeria, including on security and had passed an operational message via Ross. He expected that if Bouteflika had responded positively, Morocco would have heard back from Ross, but it had not so far. The GOM proposed a mixed commission to discuss everything, even if the border was not

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on the table. Regional security discussions with the Polisario as a participant were a non-starter, however. Morocco would await Bouteflika's re-election, he said philosophically. Charge hoped that Ross could travel on his next trip to the Western Sahara and speak to all the people there. Just as you do, replied the Minister.

10. (C) Continuing the Sahara discussion, Charge handed over the newly released human rights report and noted that the embassy, as in years past, was going to publicize the report, including with a press release in which he would note both progress and problems. While the report addressed the conditions in 2008 he wanted to raise two current concerns -- first, there is an impression that the admirable restraint shown by security forces in the Western Sahara in 2008 had slipped since the change in the Wali (centrally-appointed governor) a few weeks ago. Second, he raised the detention of a human rights activist, who had said that drug-related corruption reached high levels. This was hard to understand considering Morocco had arrested over 70 security officials in Nador. Morocco has made progress in human rights, but as outlined in the report, we still generally have concerns about limitations on freedom of expression, impunity of security forces, and trafficking in persons, specifically the

need for Morocco to establish a legal distinction between human smugglers and traffickers.

¶11. (C) TFF appreciated the cooperation with the Embassy through the human rights dialogue, which had helped his Ministry convince others of the need for changes, and he hoped it would continue. On the detained activist, whom he said was well known under the name of Zorro, there was concern that he had made scattershot accusations, possibly due to mixed motivations. He said the King was determined to act against drug-based corruption and admitted that the government had already arrested over 100 security personnel and civilians in the Nador ring, 70 percent officials. The matter is now in open judicial process and we would have to await the outcome, he said.

¶12. (C) Comment: Morocco clearly remains engaged on Middle East peace and, as usual, appears to be sticking with Saudi Arabia on intra-Arab issues. While it remains reluctant to treat the Polisario as an equal partner in the Western Sahara negotiations, the offer to Algeria seems sincere. Kalihenna may be an expendable bargaining chip but not without a bargain. The Minister accepted the criticisms in the human rights report, without the all-too-familiar recriminations heard from other quarters. Unlike in past years, he appeared relaxed about embassy contacts with pro-Polisario activists in the Sahara, a trust born of our scrupulous treatment of their allegations. We believe he shares our view that the report and our dialogue has helped push the security agencies to improve conditions on the ground. End Comment.

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